

Good morning. I am Melanie Wilde, Program Manager for the Community Health Center, Inc. Recently, I joined a fantastic group of community advocates for increasing access to oral health care in Middlesex County. I am writing today as a representative of the Community Health Center, inc. and the Opportunity Knocks Collaborative.

I am testifying in support of HB 7069, An Act Concerning Access to Oral Health Care. . The purpose of this bill is to increase the rate of reimbursement for oral health services administered to children under the age of 19 covered by Medicaid to the 70th percentile of fees charged customarily by private providers. Last year HB 5790 was killed in committee in early April, but many of us have continued advocating for increased reimbursement rates. We are requesting Governor Rell include a provision to raise Medicaid reimbursement rates for oral health services provided to patients aged 19 and younger to the 70th percentile of customary provider fees.

I currently lead a mobile dental program in Middlesex County called Miles of Smiles. We are a traveling dental program of the Community Health Center inc. and the Opportunity Knocks Initiative at Middlesex Hospital. Our purpose is to improve the oral health of children in Middlesex County. There are well over 6000 children receiving HUSKY benefits in Middlesex County and only a limited number of providers accepting HUSKY.

The mobile dental program has been providing services since April of 2006 and we have seen over 500 children in Middletown and Clinton. Of those more than 500 children, almost 25% have decay and 30% need treatment services outside of a cleaning. 75% of the children we have provided service to are HUSKY insured.

We reach out to the schools in these communities and provide on site services to children during the school day. We assist families in finding a dentist in their area that will accept their HUSKY insurance. The barrier is that there are not enough providers. Why, you may ask? Reimbursement rates are too low causing providers to turn away these families which in turn causes these families to be unable to access care.

I have heard too many stories to recount them all. Spend one day with the mobile team and you will understand why raising the reimbursement rates is so important. Families will tell you how difficult it is for them to find a dental provider in their area, or how many times they had to call their insurance company back during their 15 minute break in order to get a list of providers to call, hearing only "we are full" or "we aren't accepting anymore HUSKY patients" or "call back on the 3rd Tuesday of the month, we may open more new patient slots then." The process of finding a provider discourages families. If the reimbursement rate was increased, the provider directory would increase allowing families greater access to care. Providing children with access to healthcare instead of leaving families in the dark.

I hope you will all join us on Feb. 2nd, National Give Kids A Smile Day, at Vinnie's Jump and Jive located on Main Street in Middletown from 7:30a-9:30a for our Kick Off Celebration and Legislative breakfast in support of raising the reimbursement rates. You will be given the opportunity to learn more about this bill as well as hear testimony from those members of our community who have been greatly affected by this issue. Thank you for taking the time to listen and be here today.

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Wilde
Program Manager
CHC Inc.
Middlesex County 'Miles of Smiles'